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THE TWO REGER-LEGENDS

By ERNEST BRENNECKE

There lies before me, as I write, an attractively-printed yellow pamphlet entitled, "Ueber die Wiedergabe der Orgelkompositionen Max Regers." It purports to have been written by one Walter Fischer, organist at the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church of Berlin, for distribution at the general convention of Westphalian organists in Dortmund in May, 1910—a "Max Reger-Fest" which was to be, in the words of the pamphleteer, "eine echt deutsche Kulturtat." It is an astounding little document in many ways, full of stupidity, egoism, foolishness, and pathetic futility—and yet there breathes through it at times an ardent confidence and enthusiasm that inspire one with a touch of real regret that the great idealistic illusion, of which it is but a very humble manifestation, has passed away, never to return. Now that the Day of Judgment has arrived, one begins to feel very tragic when contemplating with any degree of intensity the spectacle of the German spirit of art and life as it was in 1910.

Here, at any rate, completely drenched in that spirit, in its wilful blindness and perversity as in its gorgeous vision, is to be found the first, the great, Reger-legend in all its dazzling purity and magnificence. "Verily," writes Fischer, "we organists shall have our hands full if we are to be called worthy contemporaries of a *Reger* . . . We are the first to whom it is *permitted* to play Reger . . . See that posterity says not of us, 'The Great Moment found but a Small People' . . . 'What went ye out into the wilderness for to see? . . . A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet!'" For the Fischers there was indeed but one God of Music, Reger—and Bach had been but his prophet. The two were bracketed together continuously and insistently, and always in this relationship. Bach had come into the world for the sole purpose of initiating us into the technic wherewith our Reger preached his gospel. . . Throughout this glutinous mass of fulsome praise, saccharine flattery, and expressions of holy awe, the reader seeks in vain a single word of dispassionate criticism. Whatever Reger saw fit to put forth, *ex cathedra* as it were, was at once accepted without question as being beyond



Max Reger

reproach—and fortunate indeed was he to whom it was not also beyond comprehension.

Reger was indeed a musical giant a decade ago. With Arthur Nikisch and the redoubtable Karl Straube, he completed the triumvirate that ruled the musical destinies of the city of Leipzig. As Professor of Composition at the Royal Conservatory there, he seemed the logical successor to Mendelssohn and Schumann. His enormous output of very black and formidable-looking music was eagerly devoured by publishers and public. The little affair at Dortmund was but one of many "Reger-Festivals." At Cologne, at Dresden, at Berlin, there were Reger-concerts, at which the great man would occasionally appear in person. Here the Boston Symphony, when it was (in 1909) still *the* orchestra of the United States, would feature as an event of the greatest magnitude the first performance of the *Symphonic Prologue to a Tragedy*, *op. 108*, and Edwin Arthur Kraft would return from foreign parts to the familiar fold of American organists, boasting of having devoted an entire recital in Berlin to Reger-compositions. And we would all enviously admire that glorious, difficult feat.

How are the mighty fallen! All that Reger's name can now evoke is a raised eyebrow or a shrugged shoulder. The Great Stir is definitely over. And yet it would be a mistake to suppose that his glory has completely vanished with the snows of yesterday. Echoes of the great legend, relics of the old worship, are occasionally encountered. To a few persistent admirers Reger still remains "one of the greatest modern composers."

He died at the age of forty-three, on May 11, 1916, and is, to those who still think about him, one of the many tragic figures of the modern Central Europe. The circumstances of his death are somewhat obscure. Paul Rosenfeld mentions "vats of beer." But by the time he died, the second legend was already well under way, its movement accelerated and intensified by the passions and prejudices of the War. I encountered it for the first time when I once showed some of the organ-music to Daniel Gregory Mason. I shall never forget with what amazement the Professor exclaimed, "Why, there's *melody* in this!" He had had but one picture of Reger in his mind up to that time: that of a great bloated spider, interminably weaving an ugly, filthy, cacophonously contrapuntal web. This picture presents the very essence of the second tradition, which bids fair to be the permanent one for musical history, unless something is done about it. Perhaps it is but a natural reaction from the first. At any

rate, Messrs. Baldwin and Kraft no longer include Reger's compositions in their recital-programs; and the general opinion, whenever an opinion is expressed (Regeriana are now extremely rare), is that his music, tremendously erudite and superlatively difficult of execution, completely lacks that indefinite quality that makes for permanent appeal in works of art.

Whatever will be the final judgment on his compositions, it is no more than an act of fairness to correct a mistaken impression of his personality that seems to be attached to the prevalent opinion of his music. He was not, as Mr. Rosenfeld imagines in his ingenious but condemnatory obituary sketch, an uncouth, repulsive Thing—not, at any rate, in his personal habits. He was a pleasant chap in his daily intercourse, according to those who knew him—as pleasant, that is, as one can expect of the German schoolmaster-type of being—a good *raconteur*, with a fund of effervescent wit and sparkle, a solid “Hausvater” like Strauss, and not at all morose, sardonic, or bitter. His photographs, though not particularly attractive (fancy vests and smoking-jackets are much in evidence), do after all show a countenance that resembles Franz Schubert's rather more than it does that of an ugly beetle.

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Is Reger the unrecognized genius of the past generation, or was he just a futile, maddening pedant? Did he fool all the true believers of the early legend, and perhaps fool himself, too? Both views of the man and his music have been given rather violent expression. Whether or not his music will make an appeal seems to depend, as indeed does nearly all music, on the temperament and mood of the listener. This is very particularly true of Reger. At the risk of following in the ways of Herr Fischer, I will cite Bach as a parallel case. People keenly alive to the appeal of music may be, very roughly, said to fall largely into two classes: those to whom Bach is dull and repetitious, and those to whom he is profoundly stirring. The difficulty with Reger is that few have heard his music, and that to-day opportunities of hearing it are very scarce. Those who have not heard it are unanimous in their professions of violent dislike, when approached on the subject. Who wants to be known as an admirer of a dead German pedant in this tense and nervous age?

About the Reger-technic there can be no question. It is an amazing thing. At an early age he was thoroughly drenched

in the Bach-counterpoint. Its turns and tricks became a part of the man himself. His paraphrases of minor Bach works, by the way, and the third part that he added to the two-part inventions of Bach, making of them a "School of trio-playing" for the organ, are among the best things he has done. But he not only thinks horizontally by nature—an accomplishment that distinguishes him from many a more successful modern composer—but his vertical harmonic skill is quite as wonderful (witness his *Beiträge zur Harmonielehre*). Expert tone-colorist as well as contrapuntist, his daring modernistic harmonic clashes once gave him a pleasant notoriety as one of the "iconoclasts" of the day. Even to an age that witnessed the powers of manipulation of material displayed by Strauss and Strawinsky, Reger appeared to be endowed with an astounding technical facility. But this very facility has worked against him in many ways.

In the first place, his unconscionable demands upon the performer's virtuosity have frightened off many an ardent investigator. When a singer is asked to span intervals of unearthly difficulty, when an organist is required to manage a shaded *decrescendo* from *ffff* to *pppp* in one line while ten fingers and both toes and heels are kept busy playing the printed notes, the impulse to turn away from such strong meat to something savoring more of the innocuous lollypop is not always to be resisted. At the same time, this very lack of regard for the physical limitations of the performer has undoubtedly enriched the technical resources of those who are to follow him, no matter what the esthetic value of his contribution may eventually prove to be. The composer's demand for the technic, both of the instrument and of the performer, always precedes the development of the technic itself. Upon the organ-builder and organist in particular, Reger makes transcendental demands—and the printed pages of his music are sometimes terror-inspiring.

That a solidly idiomatic musical language flowed so readily from his pen seems on the face of it a thoroughly commendable thing, a thing that many should envy him for, but it proved his greatest enemy in the end, for it often tempted him to compose music when he had within him no matter that cried for expression, or when the things he had to say were in themselves trivial or worse than trivial. This was a temptation that he rarely had the strength to resist, and to this weakness of his is pretty certainly due the origin of the obnoxious second Reger-legend. In so far as this legend concerns itself with those moments when Reger's cursed facility led him to produce without inspiration—

and those moments are not few—it is wholly justified. But Reger did, on occasion, have other moments.

His output was so rapid and so huge that it is impossible to believe that he spent any time in revision or in selection. Opus followed opus with a prestissimo-tempo of production comparable only to that we have seen developed by some of our shell-plants in war-time. And each opus was a substantial volume, or set of volumes. There is very little of his work, therefore, that has either the finish or the inevitability that belong to so dissimilar a thing as Debussy's *Pelléas*, upon the completion of which ten years of incessant labor were lavished. Reger very evidently published everything he wrote, probably because it all found a ready, nay, anxious, and very profitable market. The result is a vast mass of music, representing a tremendous input of enthusiasm, labor, money, and printer's ink. Economy alone demands that it be given a fair examination.

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In the organ works, which are perhaps the most easily accessible portion of Reger's output in this country, I have discovered a very fair proportion of creditable writing, and a few pieces of really great, inspired music, thoroughly wholesome food for the strong-hearted lover of vital beauty and of the truth that is often defiantly unlovely. The organ, at all events, was Reger's chosen medium, and the works he composed for that instrument represent him in his most characteristic attitudes. He did not begin to write for the orchestra, by the way, until he had reached his ninetieth opus. If we look with some care through Reger's organ works, then, which surpass those of Bach at least in the matter of bulk and total quantity, we may be able to arrive at a few conclusions that will illuminate and guide our judgment of his artistic contribution as a whole.

A superficial glance at this music clearly indicates that he had in mind continually the fine three-manual instrument in the Thomaskirche at Leipzig, where his consciousness of the nearness of the spirit of the great Bach, his predecessor in this church, must have evoked his utmost efforts. He calls for a foundation of heavy diapasons, flutes, strings and reeds, a few good solo stops and mixtures, and a pedal organ of immense power and fulness. Solidity rather than finesse is demanded, although occasionally unusually delicate tone-colorings are required.

One is next struck by his fondness for the old Lutheran chorals—a fondness that fairly amounts to an obsession. Bach,

Mendelssohn and Brahms had preceded him in the use of these wonderful church-melodies as sources of inspiration. The large choral-fantasies of Reger are a contribution to the literature of the instrument alone sufficient to bring him a deserved eminence. Their form is a combination of the programmatic symphonic poem and the choral-prelude, variation, and fugue. Taking the text of the hymn as the spiritual basis, and its melody as the thematic basis of the composition, he invests each stanza with its appropriate musical setting. The result is often a work of art that leaves little to be desired in clarity of form, in poetry of content, and in its ultimate inner appeal. The words of the choral usually supply all the comment that is necessary.

At a Palm Sunday concert at Potsdam in 1912, Dr. Otto Becker played the Fantasy on "Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme," with the following notes on his program;—they will perhaps serve to make Reger's general plan clearer:

Introduction (Grave assai.) Night; the world lies in deep slumber; only the spirits of darkness attempt to disturb the sleepers with their ghostly, tumultuous rushings to and fro. Thereupon a voice is heard from above:

Stanza I (Sostenuto)

*Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme
Der Wächter sehr hoch auf der Zinne,
Wach' auf, du Stadt Jerusalem!*

(In the interludes, as in the Introduction, there is depicted the night scene and the spirits of darkness.)

*Mitternacht heisst diese Stunde;
Sie rufet uns mit hellem Munde:
Wo seid ihr klugen Jungfrauen?
Wohlauf, der Bräut'gam kommt!*

(Imitation of bells in the distance in the pedals.)

*Steht auf, die Lampen nehmt!
Hallelujah!*

(Day begins to break.)

*Macht euch bereit zu der Hochzeit:
Ihr müsset ihm entgegen geh'n.*

(The voice resounds ever more insistently and joyously.)

Stanza II (Quasi allegro vivace)

*Zion hört die Wächter singen,
Das Herz tut ihr vor Freude springen,
Sie wachet und steht eilend auf.
Ihr Freund kommt vom Himmel prächtig,
Von Gnaden stark, von Wahrheit mächtig.
Ihr Licht wird hell, ihr Stern geht auf.*

(The world is awake. Joy is expressed by the lively triplet-figures.)

(Melody in the pedal, shimmering figuration in the other parts.)

Interlude (Allegro vivace)

The spirits of darkness vanish.

(Adagio con espressione)

*Nun komm', du werthe Kron,
Herr Jesu, Gottes Sohn!*

Hosianna!

*Wir folgen all' zum Freudensaal
Und feiern mit das Abendmahl.*

(In sudden contrast to the foregoing, there follows a very tenderly sustained poetic tone-picture.)

(Here is expressed the devotional atmosphere of the Lord's Supper and a longing for heavenly peace.)

Choral-Fugue:

There follows, in fiery tempo, a fugue expressive of the greatest joy and exultation, which, by the addition of the choral-melody (*Stanza III: Gloria sei dir gesungen*), leads up to a tremendous climax.

Reger responded magnificently to the great possibilities of this form. In all he produced seven choral-fantasies of like dimensions, and of the same general plan. Particularly noteworthy are the first (op. 26) on "Ein' feste Burg," a rugged piece of work, and the one on "Wie schön leucht't uns der Morgenstern," which can hardly be surpassed for the unerring delicacy with which all the varying moods of the text have been interpreted.

In the fifty-two shorter choral-preludes, op. 67 (evidently suggested by Bach's set of forty-six in the "Orgelbüchlein"), he has not been so inevitably successful; yet some of them, notably "Gott des Himmels und der Erden," "Jesus, meine Zuversicht," and "O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden," have that quality which will profoundly stir and move the least sympathetic listener. The harmonic scheme is never trite nor obvious, nor does it often seem far-fetched to modern ears. At their best, these preludes are real masterpieces of the form; at worst, they are rather lifeless things; but they are never really bad. They are an excellent introduction to the study of the real Reger; many of them are easy of execution—some (though they are all labelled "leicht ausführbar") require virtuoso-technic.

The greater Reger is perhaps observed at his best in the *Second Sonata*, op. 60 (the *First* is a very disappointing thing). This piece should be welcomed thankfully by a world already as weary of the efforts in this form of Guilmant, Widor and Louis Vierne as it has been wearied by those of Mendelssohn, Rheinberger and Gustav Merkel. I know of nothing with which it can be compared, unless it be with such dissimilar things as the ill-starred Julius Reubke's Ninety-Fourth Psalm-Sonata, or the Choral in A-minor of César Franck, or Liszt's Fantasy and Fugue "Ad nos, ad salutarem undam." But even these it greatly surpasses

in the perfection of its form. Those who believe that Reger never spoke a language of his own should examine the haunting second subject in the first movement—an “Improvisation” in strict sonata-form—or the *Invocation*, in which sorrowful and passionately entreating passages are followed by a shimmering, palpitating paraphrase of the choral “Vom Himmel hoch, da komm’ ich her,” or the last three or four pages, in which Reger has done some hitherto unheard-of and soul-stirring things with the fugue. It is easy to describe this music as free counterpoint in chord- and note-lines, as based on whole-tone and duodecuple scales, as using daring harmonic progressions, as displaying expertness in tone-color manipulation, but this kind of analysis can accomplish very little; here is music for the ear and nerves and brain and heart, and one can only feel sorry for those who have no heart for it. And even those will have to admit that this, whatever it is, is certainly not merely warmed-over Bach or Handel or Strauss or Debussy. . . . Of like quality—in Reger’s “grand style”—are the Passacaglia in D-minor, the Fantasy and Fugue on B-A-C-H, the Variations and Fugue, op. 72, and the Symphonic Fantasy and Fugue. But I do not know an organist in this country who is capable of performing the last.

Among the host of shorter compositions in both strict and free form, it is impossible to pass by the set that we find under op. 59, in which the composer’s inspiration and ingenuity have worked hand in hand to produce a series of unforgettable pieces. There is a *Praeludium* whose first line of overpowering sweep and dignity proclaims itself “echt Reger” of the finest quality, a *Pastorale* and a *Kanon* of a not-too-simple loveliness, an *Intermezzo* that is something new in the scherzo-vein, and a rousing Toccata and Fugue. The second book is the *vade mecum* of all true Regerites. The *Kyrie Eleison*, based throughout on a phrase of six notes, speaks at first a fervent appeal, rises to a climax of agonized groans and shrieks of despair, and breathes consolation through a beautiful melody, to the charm of which few listeners can remain obdurate. The *Gloria in Excelsis*, the *Benedictus*, and the *Te Deum*, are worthy companions;—if there is anything at all that can dispel the second Reger-legend, it is this group of compositions. If I remember rightly, it was the melodious Benedictus that seemed particularly to affect Dr. Mason.

The sustained grandeur, mingled with deep touches of a true lyric ecstasy, that is discoverable in these pieces is but seldom equalled in the voluminous later efforts of Reger. With the exception of the mordant, piquant scherzi, and a few things like

the *Moment Musical* from op. 69, there follows a general level of talk that is calm and hectic by turns, but that manages to say very little in the end. There is a great arid desert of contrapuntal material, in which a theme is put through all its logical and illogical permutations and combinations—and it seems to be a mere matter of chance if the result will be fruitful: sometimes indeed the merest chance evidently produces something worth while, as in the unearthly beauty of some spots in the *Prelude in E* from op. 80. If anyone wishes to observe Reger at his worst, at moments when he really deserves the opprobrium of the second legend, he should look at the *Monologues*, op. 63, and the *Suite*, op. 92. Even the interminable Rheinberger was seldom duller and muddier than this.

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If we now make a short excursion through some of the musical utterances for which Reger chose a different medium of expression from that of his beloved organ, we shall probably find ourselves reacting generally in about the same manner as we have just now. Noble, magnificent moments of both passion and calm will alternate with dreary, arid stretches of the most deadly boredom. Vital differences are not lacking, however. Many of the songs, for instance, of which there are over three hundred, seem occasionally to come nearer to the spirit of the brilliant and flippant conversationalist that their author really was, than does anything else that he has left behind. His settings of light, fanciful lyrics are perhaps the most immediately engaging and attractive things he has done.

His sheer cleverness can nowhere be observed to better advantage than in his manifestations of humorous psychological insight in the treatment of feminine character in the songs. He seldom chooses to take either women or the theme of secular love quite seriously, and often he selects lyrics that verge pretty closely on the forbidden territory of the salacious. The subtly-smiling Reger of "*Schmeichelkätzchen*," and the cleverly whining parodist of "*Strampelchen*" should not be altogether forgotten even when one feels prone to worship the creator of the great *Organ Fantasia* on "*Straf' mich nicht in deinem Zorn*." There is also a rare simplicity in the "*Schlichte Weisen*," and an unsophisticated charm about the "*Wiegenlied*," "*Die Nixe*," and "*Das Dorf*."

Many of the songs do possess the real Reger-undertone of grave, brooding beauty, such as the "*Liebe*," "*Grab*," "*Traum*,"

“Leben” and “Tod,” in which the expressive melodic line is raised against an accompaniment that always provides a definite and appropriate mood-setting. The piano part is often very simple, particularly for idyllic effects, but occasionally is of such complexity as almost to swamp the voice as it manfully wanders through the mazes and swamps of the Reger-harmony. At such moments we begin to detect again the dank, dead odor of the artistic charnel-house. . .

Let us not dwell on the unpleasant theme of Reger’s many unmistakably still-born *Lieder*, which comprise roughly about one-third of all his songs. Much of his violin-music is also rather pointless—but it is fortunately possible to see what the man was at times capable of accomplishing in this field by listening to Efrem Zimbalist’s phonographic record of the wonderfully poetic, almost heartrending *Andantino* from the second sonata for unaccompanied violin from op. 42.

It is very easy to share in Franz Kneisel’s enthusiasm for the string-quartet in E-flat, which was played here early in 1911, and which did not lose in effect by following directly one of the great Beethoven-quartets. Of the sonorous *Larghetto* Mr. Kneisel said at the time, “There is no other quarter-movement that so *sounds over* to the audience.” The *Scherzo* exhibits Reger as the unique jester, the malicious but good-humored, wonderfully clever satirist and clown, and the final *Fugue* is a stupendous and imposing peroration. As I think back upon the effect of the performance of this composition, I become convinced that it would triumphantly survive a well-deserved resurrection.

Of Reger’s work for orchestra it is also possible to speak at times with unqualified admiration. His *Symphonic Prologue to a Tragedy* and his *Comedy-Overture* are real achievements, uniting depth of feeling with formal perfection in such a manner that one may justly consider these compositions “classical,” in the best sense of that term. His orchestral variations and his semi-romantic later suites, in which he seems to have succumbed shamefully to the influence of the “invertebrate” Debussy, as he once called the Frenchman, had better be left in the merciful darkness of the forgotten. Would that they had never been called out of the mysterious regions of the unfulfilled!—

The same wish might be breathed with some fervency about many of the choral works, particularly the numerous “*Männerchorwerke*,” which seldom rise above the level of mediocre hack-work, and frequently fall below it. A good word must be said, however, for such creditable performances as the setting of the

one hundredth psalm, op. 106, and "Die Nonnen," op. 112. Things like the "Gesang der Verklärten," despite the gargantuan complexity of its score and the imposing array of singers and instruments required for its performance, are really very feeble, anæmic efforts.

In his piano-music, Reger has been particularly unfortunate. This is perhaps one of the reasons for his total lack of popularity along the Main Street of music today. It would have been far better for him, like Strauss, not to have written anything at all for the piano. The readily playable pieces are nearly all dull; at times there are moments of calm Brahmsian beauty which succumb all too quickly to the inevitable fogginess and mugginess, and the attempts at swiftness and gayety sound as if Messrs. Lebert and Starck were trying to add a series of modernistic—mildly modernistic—exercises to their famous "Piano-School." The themes are banal, and the harmonic daring seldom goes beyond a senseless jumping about into unrelated tonalities. Reger seems not to have realized, as many modern followers of the Schumann of the "Kinderscenen" do, that a composer is often judged by the quality of his easy piano pieces, these being the most marketable article that he can produce. And one cannot blame people for waxing impatient over the "Aquarellen," "Aus meinem Tagebuch," and the inane "Sonatinen."

It is when Reger spreads his imaginative wings and dips greedily into the inkpot that he produces lasting work for the piano. He was a remarkable performer himself, by all accounts, and it is in those works which he wrote in complete disregard of the limitations of the ordinary pianist that the greater Reger appears. This is unfortunate for the composer, for capable and willing virtuosi are very scarce. The "Variations and Fugue on a theme of Bach," op. 81, rank with the best that he has done, as do the great Concerto and the Beethoven-variations for two pianos, but who has heard these things in recent years? The last might very creditably fill an honorable place in many a two-piano recital.

The dual aspect of this alternately repelling and charming music may perhaps be fancied as a reflection of the man's own personality. As we try to bite through the horny crust of his technic and manner, cracking many a tooth in the attempt to get at the delicious meaty kernel that we firmly believe to be inside, we must often think of the man's ungainly physical bulk, his massive, ponderous frame, his generally unpromising visible aspect—an aspect that nevertheless failed to disguise completely

a sharp, delicate, exuberant mind, and a spirit that passionately loved truth and beauty. As we turn over the pages of his music and uncover great stretches of Stygian dulness, but illuminated here and there by the clear and brilliant flame of poetic genius, we cannot help thinking of the scowling mask of the second Reger-legend that covers, and indeed threatens to obscure completely, the polished man of the world and the fervent, mystical man of God that are combined in the idol of the first Reger-legend.

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It remains but to mention the Reger swan-song. Just before his death there appeared in Hameln the three "Orgelstücke," op. 145: the "Trauerode," "Dankpsalm," and "Weihnachten." Sir Charles Villiers Stanford's war-sonata, d'Indy's war-symphony, and the many lesser works which purport to have been inspired by the fret and fever of the past struggle, must fade into insignificance beside these monuments to the tragedy that happened in Central Europe. Written when all Germany believed implicitly in a final overwhelming victory, it is remarkably enough the first one of the set, the Ode of Mourning, to the memory of those who died in battle, that fixes the dominant ground-tone for the whole group. They are all pregnant with sorrow, with despair, with anger and defiance, with the religious ecstasy of resignation, but of exultation there is very little, and of pure joy there is not a trace. I know of few more dramatic moments in music than that in the Trauerode when the inconsolable sorrow and the wild despair first expressed is broken by the strains of the choral "Was Gott tut, das ist wohlgetan," in soft, but very bright, registration; or when in the *Dankpsalm* (dedicated to the German army) the furious agitation of the opening is interrupted by a recurrence of the Trauerode-mood, or when the piece sweeps on to a magnificent declaration of the tune "Lobe den Herren, den mächtigen König der Ehren." *Weihnachten* is not a happy succession of joyous Noël's; it is definitely the war-time Christmas-mood, the gloom of which is only partially dispelled by a *tour de force* of poetry and ingenuity: a combination of the melodies of "Vom Himmel hoch" and of the immortal "Stille Nacht," upon which it closes. Purest and truest poetry is in these pieces, the poetry of absolute music—music for its own sake—and the poetry that is the expression

of the tremendous spiritual tragedy that is there for him who has ears and brain and heart to hear and understand and feel it.

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It is time for a fair compromise. Let it be admitted that Reger has done things to merit both legends. All that the second legend says of him is true of his uninspired moments, but if we examine the very best of what he has done, there will doubtless be discovered enough enduring good to make the first legend sound very plausible. Certainly he has, at times, achieved a courageous brutality, a delicacy, a humanity, and a rare poetic loveliness that few others have to their credit. Sincerity of purpose all must grant him. He was essentially of his age and generation in his attempts to penetrate into the darker and more complex aspects of existence and in his rigid eschewing of the superficial; and his deeply-ingrained religious bent represents the very best of the many good qualities that went along with the bad to make up what we have now come to designate as "that pre-war German Kultur."

Lacking the geniality as well as much of the muddiness of Brahms, having very little in common with the French cult of subtlety that seems to have attracted more than its share of admiration and imitation, without any of the barbaric splendor or eastern languor of the modern Russians, and violently opposed to the theatricality of his compeer Strauss, Reger managed to win but a momentary acclamation and has since passed into obscurity. A slight reaction in his favor would probably bring real pleasure to many music-consumers and lasting benefit to many music-practitioners. Certainly the quality of the music offered in many of our churches would not be cheapened by the infusion of a little Reger.

Both of the legends are merely legends: both are false; for this man was neither God nor Insect, as he is alternately painted, but a fascinating personality possessing both godlike and spiderish attributes: a combination of amazing strength and equally amazing weakness, of charm and repulsiveness, for which a nervous age like the present should really make some show of interest, and perhaps also of gratitude.